

AUTHORIZING THE RESTORATION AND COMPLETION OF THE  
HISTORICAL FRIEZE IN THE ROTUNDA OF THE CAPITOL

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FEBRUARY 20, 1925.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the  
state of the Union and ordered to be printed

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Mr. GILBERT, from the Committee on the Library, submitted the  
following

REPORT

[To accompany H. J. Res. 28]

The Joint Committee on the Library, to which was referred House Joint Resolution 13, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with the unanimous recommendation that the joint resolution pass with the following amendment:

On page 2, line 4, strike out the figures "20,000" and insert the figures "40,000."

For many years there has been an unattractive gap in the frieze of the dome of the Capitol. There have been many resolutions introduced both in the House and Senate for its completion, but for one cause or another they have never been acted upon. This gap is 26 feet long and, being in the part of the Capitol where its decorative and artistic features should be displayed, it is rendered very conspicuous. To close this gap by completion of the frieze is to some extent objectionable from an architectural standpoint, so the Joint Committee on the Library after consulting with the Fine Arts Commission instructed the Architect of the Capitol to get estimates for several different treatments of the dome at this point. This request of the committee was in these words:

Those alternatives include, first, the method and cost of finishing the frieze as a painted frieze in accordance with the suggestion made by Mr. Smith; second, the possibility of substituting for the painted frieze a plaster frieze in relief, to be done on the basis of the present design and by persons competent to execute that design in plaster or other temporary material; third, the possibility of treating the whole frieze in more permanent fashion, as, for instance, in marble or other stone but with the present design as the basis; and, finally, the possibility of treating the entire frieze in marble or other permanent stone with an entirely new design, to be the work of some master of the art.

Pursuant to that request the architect made a report showing that estimates had been received to complete the frieze in frescoe from

sums ranging up to \$40,000. The estimates to complete the entire frieze in relief in plaster were in amounts not greater than \$235,000. An estimate for the preparation of a new design in marble by a master sculptor at \$250,000.

This frieze was begun by Brumidi, an Italian artist, who spent 27 years in decorating the Capitol and died when the frieze had been about half completed. Costigini was employed to take up the work and completed it to the point where the gap begins. This work has been done in fresco.

Fresco painting is a very ancient method of painting, first used perhaps by the Egyptians. It is a very difficult method, being done by mixing the paint into the wet plaster. This method of painting has been used by the great masters, including Michael Angelo. It is referred to by Merrifield as "the most certain and the most durable of all methods and by age it continually acquires beauty and harmony in an infinitely greater degree than any of the others."

Of course this gap should be closed as it is viewed by thousands daily and to treat it architecturally different, as shown in the estimates, would in addition to requiring a much greater expense, also destroy its historical connections. This work has become by association part of the scheme employed for the decoration of the dome not only by years of work on the part of the painters but by years of acquiescence on the part of Congress and the public and by years of observation and study by those passing under the dome. While there is a difference of opinion among the art experts as to the suitableness of this treatment, yet apparently it meets the very general approval of those who enjoy and have an understanding of art but who are not experts.

Leaks in the roof and other causes have permitted the entire frieze to become streaked and disfigured. For the sum of \$40,000 the gap can not only be completed but the entire frieze will be gone over, cleaned, and repaired and made with the new work one complete whole. It is the opinion of the committee that this work can be done for less unless the committee accept the proposal which includes a visit to France and the drawing on the battle field of a scene desired to be used. There are very few artists capable of doing this character of work, and the committee will have to investigate the ability of those seeking to do the work.

So it seems to the committee that, all things considered, it is best and most practicable to finish this work as begun by Brumidi and continued by Costigini, whatever might be its opinion as to what would have been the best at the time of beginning. The resolution is identical with the one introduced in former years when the work could perhaps been done for \$20,000, but increases in costs will not permit this work to be done at this figure now, and so the resolution is amended to cover the present high prices.